

Committee on Government Reform

Tom Davis, Chairman



MEDIA ADVISORY

**For Immediate Release
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**Contact: David Marin/Scott Kopple
(202) 225-5074**

Government Reform Committee To Review State of Foster Care in the Nation's Capital *Progress Being Made, But Children Remain At Risk*

What: Government Reform Committee on "Protecting our Most Vulnerable Residents: A Review of Reform Efforts at the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)"

When: Friday, May 16, 2003, 10 a.m.

Where: Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

Background:

Congress has been actively involved in improving the state of the child welfare system in the District of Columbia. In particular, the Government Reform Subcommittee on the District of Columbia in past years has held hearings and conducted oversight work to examine CFSA's operational problems and challenges facing the child welfare system in general.

Congress also found that D.C. Superior Court's Family Division had a weak organizational structure, poor case management, and judges were not always aware of the services available to children in the welfare system. Consequently, Congress worked with Court officials, government, and community leaders to develop a Family Court in the District that will adequately respond to the needs of the city's most vulnerable children.

A series of highly publicized incidents last year, including the abuse of underage children placed in group homes, prompted Chairman Davis to request a General Accounting Office examination of CFSA's performance measures and compliance with the Adoption and Safe

Families Act (ASFA); the implementation of key foster care policies; and the relationship between the agency and the Family Court. **Clearly, CFSA must make radical changes to its infrastructure, operations, and culture to fully achieve its mission of protecting vulnerable children. The Committee recognizes that CFSA has made progress; however, some of GAO's preliminary findings raise concerns about CFSA's remaining challenges in several areas.**

Witnesses will be asked about:

- CFSA's efforts to comply with ASFA requirements;
- The establishment of foster care policies and the agency's efforts to train the staff about them, ensure consistent implementation of the policies, and ensure related data is entered in the FACES automated case management system;
- The agency's progress to improve (1) social worker visitation with children in foster care, and (2) visitation with biological parents in cases where returning children to their parents is an option;
- CFSA's efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of social workers and lower the caseloads per social worker; and
- The status of communication between the Family Court and CFSA.

Witnesses:

Cornelia Ashby, Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security, U.S. General Accounting Office

Dr. Olivia A. Golden, Director, District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency

Judith Meltzer, Deputy Director, Center for the Study of Social Policy (Court Monitor)

Anne Schneiders, Esq., LISW, Chair, The National Association of Counsel for Children - Washington Metro Chapter

Jennifer Massengale, Acting Executive Director, D.C. Children's Advocacy Center (Safe Shores)

Marilyn Edgerton, Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center

Matt Fraiden, Legal Director, The Children's Law Center of Washington, D.C.

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